Utility Patent Application

CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION

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CUPHOLDING PLATE

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

The present invention relates generally to eating utensils and, more particularly, to cups and plates.

2. Description of the Related Art

As is well-known in the art, cups and plates have been used together during dining for quite some time. And, although many conventional designs have developed for use in the normal setting wherein individuals are seated directly at a flat, horizontal eating surface, many modifications and novelties have developed to accommodate situation dissimilar to this scenario.

For example, sectioned plates have evolved in order to provide separate surfaces of the plate with dividers to prevent intermixing of the plate contents.

Other developments have evolved plates with coasters built in, plates and cups made of disposable material, such as paper or foam, and various apparatuses that support both plates and cups together.

One major problem that remains unaddressed arises from situations where food and drink are served absent a flat, horizontal eating surface being provided. Although the example is more clearly illustrated when discussing a situation including paper plates and paper cups, similar problems can be noticed in any buffet or picnic setting. Namely, a problem arises when an individual needs to hold the plate in one hand and the drink in the other, thereby making it a difficult "juggling act" to prevent spilling, obtain servings, consume food or beverage, and the like.

Prior attempts to address this situation are seen in U.S. Patent No. Des.430,457, Des. 429,963, Des. 429,962, Des. 429,604, and Des. 429.605, all issued to the present applicant. However, in practice these attempts have resulted in a structural weakness located at the partition between adjacent plate segments. Further still, the application of a large diameter orifice formed within the place for functioning as a cup holding area further exacerbates this inherent weakness.

Consequently, a need has been felt for providing an apparatus and method which provides a plate that can additionally be utilized to hold or support

a cup without collapsing. These, in addition to other elements in combination are different enough as to make the combination distinguished over these related references.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Therefore, it is an object of the invention to indicate a device of the type disclosed above which avoids the disadvantages inherent in the state of the art. In particular, a plate is provided capable of holding and interfitting with a cup in a manner that retains its structural integrity while minimizing the intrusion into the available space on the plate.

It is therefore an object of the present invention to provide an improved plate.

It is another object of the present invention to provide an improved plate that can support a cup.

It is a feature of the present invention to provide an improved cupholding plate that has a cup support ring integrated with a peripheral plate rim, thereby increasing the structural integrity of both the plate as well as the cup holding feature.

Briefly described according to one embodiment of the present invention, a cupholding plate is provided having a conventional, generally circular form, but

including a stiffened peripheral rim circumscribing the entire plate support surface. Contained within the outer circumference of the plate is a cup retaining orifice, which is itself circumscribed by a stiffened cup support rim. The cup support rim intersects with the peripheral rim at the plate edge, such that both the peripheral rim and the cup support rim can be superimposed about each other along a small arc along their respective circumferences.

Another preferred embodiment of the present invention has a plurality of compartments formed at the surface of and within the volume of the plate, thereby providing the advantages of traditional compartmented plates with the features and benefits of the present invention.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The advantages and features of the present invention will become better understood with reference to the following more detailed description and claims taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, in which like elements are identified with like symbols, and in which:

FIG. 1 is a perspective view of a three-sectioned cupholding plate according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 2 is a top plan view thereof;

FIG. 3 is a cross section centerline view taken along lines II-II of FIG. 1;

FIG. 4 is a perspective view of a two-sectioned cupholding plate according to a first alternate embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 5 is a top plan view thereof;

FIG. 6 is a perspective view of a one-sectioned cupholding plate according to a second alternate embodiment of the present invention; and

FIG. 7 is a top plan view thereof.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

1. Detailed Description of the Figures

Referring now to the Figures1-3, a cupholding plate, generally noted as 20 according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention is shown having a conventional, generally circular form. The plate 20 is bounded about its periphery 22 circumscribing the entire plate support surface 24. Bordering the edge 22 is a circular outer flange 26. As shown best in FIG. 3, the outer flange 26 is elevated above the plate support surface 24, and is connected thereto by an upwardly curving peripheral rim 28. The combination of the circular outer flange 26 and upwardly curving peripheral rim 28 provide sufficient strength to the support surface 24 such as to allow the surface 24 to be loaded with a significant amount of weight, relative to the weight of the plate 20 itself, without sagging, twisting or collapsing.

A pair of partition elements, shown as a first partition element 30 and a second partition element 32, connect at a centerpoint "C" and radiate out to the periphery 22. Each partition element 30, 32 have a flat upper apex 34 connecting to the circular outer flange 26 at the flanges elevation, and transitions smoothly to the elevation of the plate support surface 24 by a curving partition sidewall 36 having a similar curvature with the upwardly curving peripheral rim 28. The partition elements 30, 32 form an acute angle at centerpoint "C" at the base of the partition sidewall 36. A first large compartment 38 is formed at the acute angle between the partition elements 30, 32 and the outer flange 26.

Further, positioned such as to intersect at the outer circumference of the plate 20 is formed a cup retaining orifice 40, which is itself circumscribed by a stiffened cup support rim 42. In order to obtain the improved structural rigidity, while at the same time maximizing the available plate support surface 24 for any given plate size, the cup support rim 42 intersects with the circular outer flange 26 at the plate edge, such that both the outer flange 26 and the cup support rim 42 can be superimposed about each other along a small arc along their respective circumferences. Opposite the outer connection point between the cup support rim 42 and outer flange 26 is a third partition element 44 connecting the cup support rim 42 with the flat upper apex 34 of the other partition elements 30, 32. The third partition element 44 has a flat upper apex 34 that transitions

smoothly to the elevation of the plate support surface 24 by a curving partition sidewall 36 having a similar curvature with the upwardly curving peripheral rim 28. The partition elements 30, 32 44 form an acute angle at centerpoint "C" at the base of the partition sidewall 36. A first small compartment 46 and a second small compartment 48 are thereby formed.

Referring to FIG. 7-9, a single compartmented cupholding plate is depicted having an overall rectangular shape. Such a shape is conventionally known for plates, and especially disposable type plates, and this embodiment depicts all the present teachings incorporated therein.

Referring now to FIG. 4-5, similarly shown is a first alternate embodiment depicting only one compartment partition element 50 is included in a manner that provides all the same benefits of the preferred embodiment, with the added feature of separate food containing compartment placed permanently therein. It is envisioned that the separation channel spans between the circular outer flange 26 and the cupholding rim 42 through the centerpoint "C" in a manner that prevents decreases in structural integrity nor interferes with the functionality of the other disclosed features. In such a configuration, two equally sized compartments 52 are thereby formed on the plate support surface 24.

As shown in FIG. 6-7, the cupholding plate 20 depicting a single compartmented plate absent any partition elements.As shown in FIG. 6-7, the

cupholding plate 20 depicting a single compartmented plate indicates a first, standard embodiment that can be manufactured of permanent or disposable material in any conventional manner

Finally, it is the intent of the present invention to incorporate the function and features with conventional fabrication methods and elements. To this end, it is envisioned that the cupholding plate of the present invention can be integrally formed into a single structural element, and made of a conventional permanent plate material, such as plastic, china, and the like, or a conventional disposable material, such as foam, paper, pressed paper, or plastic.

2. Operation of the Preferred Embodiment

In accordance with a any of the embodiments of the present invention, as shown throughout the figures, use of the present invention is simple, straightforward, and intuitive. Any conventional cup can be placed within the cup receiving orifice. It will thereby impinge against the cupholding rim in a manner that allows the user to hold the plate with one hand and manipulate an eating utensil, such as a spoon or fork, with the other hand. In this manner, a user can alternate between manipulation of the eating utensil and grasping of the cup.

As designed, a device embodying the teachings of the present invention is easily applied. Many other embodiments are now envisioned based upon the

present teachings, that can provide similar features but identical functionality. By way of example, and not by limitation, one such variation can include the moving of the cup receiving orifice radially outward from the center of the plate, past the outside of the peripheral edge of the plate. In this manner, additional food retaining space can be generated, with the cup retaining means occupying less area.

Again, other variations are imaginable and envisioned based upon the present teachings. Therefore, the foregoing description is included to illustrate the operation of the preferred embodiment and is not meant to limit the scope of the invention. As one can envision, an individual skilled in the relevant art, in conjunction with the present teachings, would be capable of incorporating many minor modifications that are anticipated within this disclosure. Therefore, the scope of the invention is to be broadly limited only by the following claims.